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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 000674

SIPDIS

CAIRO FOR MAXSTADT

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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS ON APRIL 12

Classified by Ambassador Howard F. Jeter. Reason: 1.5(d).

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: The April 12 National Assembly elections will demonstrate if the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was right when it said it was ready to hold these and the April 19 gubernatorial and presidential polls. In addition to being a logistical "dry run" for the April 19 polls, the National Assembly elections will indicate the prevailing political mood. We believe the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) will lose some seats. Increased competition resulting from the entry of new political parties and unbridled aisle-crossing by incumbents who lost primaries will diminish today's substantial PDP majority. However, if the PDP loses too many seats, "bandwagon effect" for the opposition could develop, spelling trouble for President Obasanjo the following week. END SUMMARY.

PDP Majority Likely To Diminish

12. (C) The ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) originally had a majority of 73 seats out of 109 (67 percent) in the Senate and 216 seats out of 359 (60 percent) in the House. However, there will be many new faces in the next National Assembly. The current National Assembly did not distinguish itself as a law-making body. Most Nigerians saw it as venal, indifferent, and ineffective. Some legislators from all three parties in the National Assembly (PDP, ANPP and AD) declined to seek party renomination because of their unpopularity, others found their renominations stymied by antagonistic governors. Within the PDP, the Presidency and PDP National Executive teamed to foil the reelection ambitions of many other National Assembly incumbents who had supported the impeachment threat against President Obasanjo or had managed through other means to get on the President's bad side. Only 30 percent of PDP incumbents were renominated by the PDP.

Citizens Frustrated

13. (SBU) Given the PDP's sizeable numerical advantage some "leveling" was expected, under even the best circumstances. However, current political and economic conditions have citizens seething. Lengthy queues for petrol have become a symbol of a general malaise of ills. Almost any incumbent would be nervous under these emergent conditions, but the PDP will bear the brunt of the electoral disaffection over a stagnant economy, deteriorating public infrastructure (schools, roads, hospitals, utilities), endemic corruption, widespread communal violence and the failure of all levels of government to meet their financial obligations. After all, the ruling party has controlled the Presidency, 21 of 36 governorships and both Houses of the National Assembly for nearly four years.

More Competition

14. (SBU) Moreover, competition has been more intense than in 1999. The fact that the number of parties has increased from 3 to 30 since the last election means the PDP will likely have a reduced share of the pie this time around. Credible candidates who were reluctant to run in 1999 (perhaps because they feared the Fourth Republic would quickly vanish) have changed

their minds. Many of these candidates are running under the banner of opposition parties. Some of the new parties, such as the Igbo-dominated All People's Grand Alliance (APGA), would have trouble winning the Presidency but can field popular candidates in some races on their home turf. These smaller parties can give both the PDP and the main opposition All Nigerian People's Party (ANPP) a real run for popular votes.

Opposition from Governors and the Presidency

15. (C) Another factor is that the advantages of incumbency are much weaker for National Assembly members than Governors or the President. Again, because the PDP has such a large majority, it must defend more seats. Finally, popular PDP incumbents who ran afoul of their governors or the Presidency typically found themselves denied renomination. Governors used their control of the PDP apparatus in their states to defeat political opponents during party caucuses late last year. The Presidency more than once weighed in with governors and other state-level officials to stymie its opponents.

16. (C) Three of the four senior officers of the National Assembly might not return. Having lost a battle for control of the Ebonyi PDP to Governor Sam Egwu and having failed in his effort to impeach Obasanjo for his support of Egwu, Senate President Anyim decided not to seek re-election. Speaker of the House Ghali Umar Na'Abba was able to secure renomination despite Governor Kwankwaso's and Obasanjo's opposition because of overwhelming popular support for Na'Abba in his Kano constituency. However, the Kano PDP recently expelled Na'Abba for "anti-party" activity, an action that would have forfeited the seat. Sensing trouble, the national PDP decided to "suspend" Na'Abba, so his post-election fate is far from clear, even if he wins his constituency. Deputy House Speaker Prince Chibudom Nwuche's primary challenge failed to unseat Rivers Governor Peter Odili, a strong Obasanjo ally. Among the top four National Assembly officers, only Deputy Senate President Ibrahim Mantu (another Obasanjo ally) seems certain to return.

Crossing the Aisle

17. (SBU) Popular politicians cast aside by the PDP often joined another party. Nwuche pitched his tent with the ANPP, as did former Senate President Okadigbo. Nwuche continues to run for the Rivers governorship and Okadigbo is now Buhari's running mate on the ANPP Presidential ticket. Other PDP National Assembly members are seeking to return on the ticket of another party.

Comment

18. (C) INEC plans to formally announce the results of the National Assembly elections on April 17, two days prior to the presidential contest. Informal but accurate results may be known before then. The timing of the results' announcement is extremely important. If the results are actually announced prior to April 19, the legislative elections may take on aspects akin to a "vote of confidence" or a referendum on the President. The PDP is expected to lose seats. However, losing too many seats, particularly in areas where the PDP was assumed to be strong, will be perceived as a shift in electoral momentum heading into the Presidential campaign. It will be taken as evidence that Obasanjo's strength is waning and could produce a "bandwagon effect" away from the PDP. The principal beneficiary of this phenomenon would be ANPP Presidential candidate Muhammadu Buhari.

JETER